



Barber Named Director of Consortium

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The Greater Tompkins Municipal Health Consortium has a new executive director – Don Barber. Actually, Barber isn't just the new executive director, he's the consortium's first executive director.

If Barber's name sounds familiar, it should. He is the Town of Caroline Supervisor, a former chair of the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG), and – until recently – the president of the consortium's board of directors.

The consortium allows the members- town and village governments- to pool their resources to buy insurance for their employees. It was begun in 2009 by members of TCCOG- Tompkins County Council of Governments- to save insurance costs.

Barber explained why the consortium needed to hire an executive director at this juncture, saying, "The consortium is in its fourth year and it's a business that has over \$30 million in premiums that they receive [per year]. The board of directors is all volunteers and they're looking for professional help to do the work that they need to have done."

He continued, "I was, up until very recently, the president of the board of directors and I was doing the bulk of this work in my spare time. I was definitely falling behind the amount of work that needed to be done and it was the perception of the board that it was more than should be asked of any volunteer to keep the consortium running."

In total, there were four applicants for the position, which is intended as a part-time position. Barber explained how envisions his the position's responsibilities: "My role is to support the board and make sure they have the information they need and stay on top of the decisions that need to be made."

In his new position one of the first things Barber is planning is an insurance "retreat" in September. The retreat, which is for the board and any members of the consortium, is to explain basic issues regarding health insurance, the future of health care coverage, and the impacts of the Affordable Care Act. Barber said, "It's essentially Insurance 101."

"The next thing that we're working on," he continued, "is creating an orientation manual not only for municipalities but also for the bargaining units."

In a change that is unrelated to his new position, Barber said that the consortium's finance committee is recommending that premiums increase by 5 percent this year. That is a smaller increase than the consortium has seen in recent years while it was trying to build its reserves.

The consortium sets the premiums and devises the insurance plans itself because instead of simply purchasing group insurance from an existing company, the consortium actually is the insurance company. However, municipal employees who are insured through the consortium carry Excellus insurance cards because the insurance is administered by Excellus.

What exactly does it mean to have insurance that is "administered by" Excellus? Barber explained, "If you were to have insurance through Excellus and you went to the doctor they would fill out a claims form and send it in and the provider gets paid. [With the consortium] all that process from the time you see the doctor till the payment is done through Excellus, but they send the consortium a bill every two weeks."

This arrangement results in a significant premium reduction – as opposed to a regular Excellus plan – for small municipalities, but a less significant reduction for the largest municipality, the County of Tompkins. In total, there are 15 municipalities in the plan, including 14 from Tompkins County plus the City of Cortland. The only Tompkins municipalities currently not in the consortium are the Town of Newfield, the Village of Lansing, and the Village of Freeville.